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# What is international about International Schools? An institutional legitimacy perspective

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the number of International Schools around the world has increased rapidly largely as a result of growth of new forms of International Schools, which differ markedly from the traditional forms. These new forms: are often operated on a for-profit commercial basis; are usually for children from the local (indigenous), wealthy population; and have been defined as International Schools because they are located in a non-English speaking country and English is the school's medium of communication. The growth of International Schools of the non-traditional type raises issues about the legitimacy of such schools. These new forms of International School face particular challenges in establishing themselves legitimately as 'international'. In this article, we develop a framework which is grounded in institutional theory to analyse the institutionalisation of and the consequent legitimacy of International Schools. We use the three pillars of institutionalisation which, by means of carriers, underpin the institutionalisation of organisations. We employ this framework to analyse and illustrate the legitimacy of a school's claim to be an International School and also to bring to light the challenges that schools face in establishing a legitimate claim to be 'international'.

## KEYWORDS

International schools;  
international education;  
institutionalisation;  
legitimacy

## Introduction

The number of schools around the world classified as International Schools continues to grow rapidly (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; Hayden, 2011). According to recently published data (*EducationInvestor*, 2015), 4.2 million children currently attend International Schools, up from 2.5 million five years ago. This number is expected to reach 8.26 million by 2025 (*EducationInvestor*, 2015), which approximates to the number of students currently attending schools in England (DfE, 2014). Schools designating themselves as international and/or others doing so can no longer be considered a peripheral dimension of educational provision worldwide; they are of central interest.

Aside from the increase in the number of International Schools, other recent developments have enhanced the significance of ensuring and evidencing the legitimacy of such schools. These developments include, *inter alia*, the spread of International Schools into new settings (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013); increased quality assurance demands resulting from the growing number of local (indigenous) students attending International Schools (Bunnell,

2014; Hill, 2014); the pressures arising from home-country stakeholders such as parents and national governments as a consequence of the growth of International Schools (Brummitt, 2007); and the emergence of a more active engagement in school choice among the parents of prospective students (Brummitt, 2007) with the consequent increasing competition for students (Shortland, 2013).

With these developments and the rapid growth of International Schools, it is timely to ask: 'What is international about International Schools?' and to analyse the legitimacy of International Schools as providers of an international education.

Institutional legitimacy is a complex notion with a range of institutionalising forces contributing to it and establishing organisations as legitimate institutions (Scott, 2014). Arguably, institutional legitimacy is crucial for the success and survival of International Schools, as it is for all schools, but for International Schools there is the added obligation to establish themselves legitimately as international. The institutional legitimacy of International Schools is also critically important for the students who attend them, for their well-being and development, and the appropriateness of their education; and for the growing cadre of teachers seeking to make working in International Schools their career-choice. It is also relevant to the notion of international education and what constitutes such a form of education.

Our intentions in this article are to: consider the nature of International Schools and how such schools are characterised; explore an analytical framework for the institutionalisation of International Schools and to develop and illustrate that framework; and to bring to the fore the challenges International Schools must address if they are to be legitimately designated as international and/or are seeking to define themselves legitimately as such. We draw in particular on the work of the American sociologist William Richard Scott on institutionalisation theory (Scott, 2014). We also employ Suchman's (1995) analysis of institutional legitimacy and work with the ideas of other institutional theoreticians, such as March and Olsen (1989) and Jepperson (1991). We consider that the analytical framework, which we illustrate with examples, will be of value to both theoreticians and practitioners. In the article, it will become clear that the criterion of 'providing an English-medium curriculum outside an English-speaking country' (ISC, 2015) is not sufficient to underpin a legitimate claim to be an International School. Such a claim is in itself too narrow and any claim to be 'international' needs a wider underpinning from a broader range of institutionalising forces. This requirement for a wider underpinning presents International Schools with a number of challenges.

The article begins with a consideration of International Schools, which is followed by an analysis of the concept of institutional legitimacy. We then explore institutionalisation theory (Scott, 2014) and illustrate, particularly in relation to International Schools, the carriers of institutionalisation (Jepperson, 1991), which convey, transmit and communicate institutionalisation. We also consider the challenges International Schools face and must respond to if they are to legitimately claim to be international. We end the article with some concluding comments.

## International Schools

Until quite recently, International Schools could be classified as either Type A Traditional or Type B Ideological (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). Such a classification is being rapidly and

substantially extended by a new form: Type C Non-traditional (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), which is having a significant impact on the International School landscape.

A Type A Traditional International School is 'one established to offer education to the children of globally mobile parents', and has 'a large cultural mix of children' (Mayer, 1968, p. 10). Schools of this type are sometimes referred to as the 'standard type' (Peterson, 1987), or the 'ideal type' (Leach, 1969). They are usually privately funded, with the parents paying fees, but are not run commercially on a for-profit basis. Often they have been established in locations where a parent (or parents) takes a work assignment for a year or more (Hill, 2014). Such schools are generally small with limited resources, or were so initially. The majority of the students attending Type A schools are expatriate, typically from western countries and not from the locality, and English is the spoken and written medium of communication (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013). These schools are often run as parent co-operatives, or started that way, and parental involvement is often considerable (Benson, 2011). Type A schools have formed long-standing membership associations, such as the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), which was established in 1965 (ECIS, 2015).

Type B Ideological International Schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013) are those committed to education for global peace and/or the philosophy of Kurt Hahn (Veevers & Pete, 2011) and are relatively few in number. Exemplars include the United World Colleges, such as Atlantic College, Wales, UK and the International School of Geneva (van Oord, 2010). Schools of this type, identified by Bunnell (2013) as 'pioneer' schools, have a unique ideological form of international internationalism (Leach, 1969). At the heart of this typology is the notion of international mindedness; the schools seek to ensure an international perspective through their curricula, for example through the curricula of the International Baccalaureate (Hill, 2014).

In the 1960s estimates of the number of International Schools world-wide, which would have been largely of the Type A Traditional form (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), reveal a relatively modest total. In 1968, there were about 400 Type A schools around the world 'established at least in part for the benefit of the children of a temporarily expatriated community' (Mayer, 1968, p. 10). At broadly the same time, Leach (1969) listed a total of 372 International Schools worldwide, of which 76 were in Asia, and just 15 in the Middle East, educating approximately 80,000 children. In the early 1990s, Jonietz (1992), using the same definition as Mayer (1968), estimated that International Schools around the world numbered 500, which shows a relatively small increase in numbers over the preceding two decades.

The International School landscape, comprising the Type A Traditional form pragmatically serving the global market and the Type B Ideological form serving global peace and internationalism, is being reconfigured by the rapid growth of a new kind of International School categorised as Type C Non-traditional (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). A recent study of International Schools argues that 'this sustained growth is bringing fundamental changes to the character and nature of international schools' (Hallgarten, Tabberer & McCarthy, 2015, p. 7) and that with the growth 'has come a greater range of approaches that may be diluting the distinctiveness of the [International School] model' (p. 3). These Type C International Schools have various characteristics.

One major and very evident characteristic of schools of this new Type C form is that they are typically privately owned and are operated to make a profit for the owners, although we acknowledge that the notions of for-profit and commercial operation and the underpinning motivations can be variously configured (Haywood, 2015). These Type C schools have

emerged as investors have identified such schools as a lucrative investment (Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Lewandowski, 2012). In 2009, reports suggested that 'for-profit [international] schools are seemingly becoming more common, especially in regions such as Asia' (MacDonald, 2009, p. 83). Four years later, Brummitt and Keeling (2013) concluded that 'most international schools are for-profit' (p. 30).

Many Type C International Schools enroll their students from the local (indigenous) population and serve an '*aspirational middle class*' (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 7). Such students are often very much in the majority in Type C Non-Traditional International Schools: 'Today local children fill 80% of international school places, a complete reversal of 30 years ago when 80% were filled by expatriate children' (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013, p. 29). In parallel with that change, the number of parents taking up employed positions overseas accompanied by their children has fallen (Shortland, 2013).

With local/indigenous parents wanting their children to attend International Schools and the requirement of parents to pay fees, in 2007, the future growth of International Schools was predicted to be dominated by the interests and demands of local wealthy parents (Brummitt, 2007). Subsequently, that prediction has come to pass. The most wealthy 5% of non-English-speaking local parents seeking places in International Schools for their children is now a significant factor, if not the dominant factor, in student enrolment to International Schools (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013).

The growing number of for-profit International Schools has been accompanied by the emergence of chains of such schools operated by commercial companies such as the Dubai-based Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) Education Ltd. Arguably, these chains of International Schools are the most openly ambitious and publicised of the new entrants into the field (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). A variant of this new form are the branded English private schools, termed 'satellite colleges' (Bunnell, 2008), being established in other countries. For example, Repton School Dubai is a recently established satellite college of Repton School, a fee-paying school in England founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Although the number of Type C schools is increasing, part of that increase results from a much broader definition of what constitutes an International School. The International Schools Consultancy (ISC) has mapped the growth of International Schools and their data have become important. They deem a school to be 'an international school if the school delivers a curriculum ... wholly or partly in English outside an English-speaking country' (ISC, 2015, p. 1). Although useful, the definition is much broader than that used by many others over a long period as we have discussed above.

Using the ISC (2015) definition, the number of schools considered to be International Schools rose from 1,700 in April 2000 to 3,876 in July 2006 (Brummitt, 2007), to 6,717 in January 2012 (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013) and to 7,017 in 2014 (ICEF Monitor, 2014). Thus the number of International Schools has increased four-fold between 2002 and 2014. Brummitt and Keeling (2013) estimate that by 2022, International Schools will number 11,000 and will be teaching 6 million children.

The authors of ISC reports recognise that a 'number of grey areas' (Brummitt, 2009, p. 13) arise from the broad definition they use to define International Schools. For example, in India and Pakistan, English is the medium of communication in many schools including those that would not want to claim International School status. However, the problems with such a broad definition are more substantive than that. They relate to the Anglo-centric nature of the definition of International Schools as being those schools providing an English-medium

curriculum outside an English-speaking country. There is a very strong case for arguing that 'English' could be substituted by a different language, for example, 'Spanish', 'Mandarin' or 'Arabic' and that such schools included in those definitions should be able to claim International School status. Interestingly, Pearce (2013, p. 69) argues that by 2022, China will become 'the dominant sponsor of international schools'. It remains to be seen whether the medium of communication in these schools is English but it would surely be surprising if that turned out to be the case. These 'China-sponsored International Schools' may well be providing a (Chinese) curriculum wholly or partly in Mandarin in a country outside China. Significant issues thus arise from the broad definition of International Schools offered by the ISC (2015).

This change in the international schooling landscape is both substantive and significant and is now beginning to affect national systems. Concern has begun to emerge in some countries because International Schools may not comply with national government requirements. In essence their legitimacy is being questioned especially as the growth of International Schools begins to create unwelcome competition with local state-funded schools. For example, in April 2014, the Indonesian Education and Culture Ministry stated that all teachers in International Schools must be proficient in Indonesian, and that a school could not be fully owned by foreign stakeholders (The Jakarta Post, 2014). Furthermore, all International Schools must immediately drop the title 'International'. The Indonesian Ministerial decree noted that a majority of International Schools in Indonesia did not have any external accreditation, which was viewed negatively by the Ministry. The legitimacy of International Schools in Indonesia, unquestioned during the traditional and ideal International School era, is now a matter of concern.

Until recently, the Type C form of International School has undergone little critical analysis or been central in discussion and debate on International Schools (Pearce, 2013). Referring to International Schools and the new landscape largely resulting from the growth of Type C schools, Brummitt and Keeling (2013, p. 27) report: 'The demographic breakdown, learning approach and business model have all changed and it is no longer a small market catering for a niche group'. This new landscape might be deemed as being non-ideal, or post-ideal but nonetheless it stands in stark contrast to Leach's (1969) vision of the ideal International School. The emerging presence of the Type C International School substantially further complicates an already complex International School landscape.

In summary, the landscape of International Schools has substantially changed in recent years. The change is characterised by the development of a new form of International School typically run commercially on a for-profit basis, attended by increasing numbers of local (indigenous) students from wealthy backgrounds, possibly organised into and managed as chains of for-profit International Schools, and the growth of branded English private schools in other countries. This change raises issues about such institutions as legitimate International Schools, which is the issue we address in this article.

## **A normative analysis of International Schools**

Querying the international nature of Type C International Schools requires a normative sense of the characteristics of International Schools. Glatter (2015) in seeking to establish state-funded schools in England as institutions on a normative basis suggests that schools as 'institutions are committed to a set of values beyond the transmission of knowledge and

skills, as well as to breadth in education'. Arguably, a normative view of International Schools should go beyond that view to encompass what International Schools should be like as institutions to make them legitimate as such schools. In making that assertion, we are not arguing for complete uniformity for all International Schools, the 'single blueprint' referred to by Phillips (2002, p. 160). Such uniformity for International Schools as legitimate institutions is not possible or desirable and is not a necessary outcome of institutionalisation (Scott, 2014). Nonetheless, we would argue that, on a normative basis, a model of what an International School should be to be international can be developed and, indeed, a number of authors have done so. Jonietz (1992) argues that International Schools are independent of state provision; are community-based; have English as the medium of communication; cater for students who are from the expatriate community; are typically small in terms of the number of students; are operated on a not-for-profit basis; and provide the International Baccalaureate curriculum.

The range of nationalities in the student body has always been seen as an important and some argue essential element of International Schools. Thus Hayden and Thompson (2000, p. 5) assert: 'diversity is not only an inherent feature of International Schools, but is also a crucial aspect of the process of international education'. Other authors have also stressed this aspect of International Schools. Sylvester (1998) has argued that a minimum of 30–40 student nationalities is needed for a school to be considered to be genuinely International. Thus it has been argued that cultural diversity in the student body is required for a school to be legitimately viewed on a normative basis as International.

## **Institutional legitimacy**

Suchman (1995, p. 547) argues that 'legitimacy is a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions'. The notion of legitimacy brings with it a sense of an acceptance and an alignment between an institution's mores and practices and the expectations of those in the institution's environment and context in which it is located.

Early thinking about institutional legitimacy centred on the overlay between the institution and environment (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Maurer, 1971). A sense of providing some form of public witness and justification regarding institutional activities can be seen in the view that '... legitimisation is the process whereby an organization justifies to a peer or super-ordinate system its right to exist' (Maurer, 1971, p. 361). Arguably, on that basis, institutions calling themselves 'schools' should actively provide evidence to justify their continued existence and to support and establish their legitimacy. Interestingly, International Schools are increasingly being required to undergo an accreditation process, which in some instances, for example in Abu Dhabi, results in the public rendition of the outcome (Fertig, 2007). This requirement exemplifies International Schools justifying their legitimate existence to a super-ordinate system.

The positioning of institutions within a wider social context is a central feature of one perspective on legitimacy. This perspective argues that legitimacy is concerned with the 'congruence between the social values associated with or implied by (organisational) activities and the norms of acceptable behaviour in the larger social system' (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 122). Such a view poses significant questions for institutions, such as schools, that



are located within a socially constructed and multi-faceted larger social system. As institutions, they are dependent on enabling forces within that larger system for both their emergence and their continued existence. For International Schools, there are issues relating to the activities and norms of acceptable behaviour when clarity of an International School's constituencies and its stakeholders is lacking. Bunnell (2014) reports that the parent groups traditionally associated with International Schools are changing as growing numbers of local (indigenous) families send their children to them.

The close relationship between the internal activities and practices of individuals who make up the institution, both separately and collectively, and the legitimising potential found within the institution's external environment is significant (Drori & Honig, 2013). These two pressures are symbiotic, since 'legitimacy involves notions of what is proper or appropriate and implies instrumental or intentional actions for mobilizing societal approval' (Drori & Honig, 2013, p. 349). These views have implications for institutions which call themselves 'schools' and in particular International Schools. The first relates to the degree of clarity about what is considered 'proper and appropriate' and by which agencies within the external environment. The second refers to the extent to which these notions and the internal processes and practices of the school can be aligned. The reality here for institutions such as schools is that they are likely to focus on the ways that the internal aspects of school life coalesce around the requirements of external factors such as accreditation or inspection.

Institutional legitimacy for schools first necessitates a sound and cogent understanding by those within the institution, such as those responsible for leadership and governance, of the exigencies and demands of the external environment. Second, it requires an internal drive, likely to be initiated by those in leadership or governance positions, to align institutional practice and processes with these external demands. Success in this area enhances the organisation's legitimacy, increases the organisation's chances of survival, and increases its potential for accruing additional resources. Ensuring institutional legitimacy is thus crucial to International Schools but it is a process made more difficult by the often complex multiple 'institutional logics' at play.

## **Institutional logics**

Friedland and Alford (1991) contended that society and organisations within society comprise multiple logics, each associated with 'a set of material practices and symbolic constructions' (p. 248), that provide frames of reference which impact on individuals' choices of behaviour. As a result, as Currie and Spyridonidis (2015, p. 2) argue, 'organizational fields are characterized by institutional complexity, comprising multiple logics, as opposed to being dominated by a single logic'. These logics might be in competition with each other but, alternatively, may enable organisational actors to cooperate. One aspect that has potential impact upon the legitimation process is the ways in which institutional actors might seek to cooperate in order to co-exist and keep their organisation apart from people or practices that are seen to be following opposing or competing logics (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

## **The institutionalisation of organisations**

Institutions are social structures that 'provide stability and meaning to social life' (Scott, 2014, p. 56). They can both enable and constrain action (Giddens, 1979; 1984; Sewell, 1992).

Understandably, institutions in society are wide-ranging and, for example, include stock markets, hospitals, marriage, the justice system and schools. In addition, they all have many different aspects—they are multi-faceted and are typically complex. That institutions give stability and meaning calls up the notion of durability: their enduring nature giving ‘solidity’ to society over time and across space (Giddens, 1984); they can be reproduced and transmitted through generations and thereby maintained (Zucker, 1977); and may be considered to be resistant to change (Jepperson, 1991). Scott (2014), whilst arguing for the relative durability of institutions, also suggests that nonetheless they can and do change over time. In truth there is a strong case for saying that institutions, much like organisations, both stay the same and change over time (Hatch, 2004).

There are obvious similarities between organisations and institutions but there are also key differences. Legitimacy is an important concept in distinguishing between them. Clearly some organisations, for example, criminal gangs, people trafficking groups, or drug smugglers, would not be considered to have widespread social legitimacy and be considered to be institutions. Further, not all institutions, for example, marriage, are readily amenable to organisational analysis. Nonetheless, as Parsons (1956) argued nearly 60 years ago, organisations are widely prevalent in society as a way of achieving goals that require collective coordinated action. Many organisations are institutions, and they become so through institutionalisation.

## **The pillars of institutionalisation**

Scott (2014) argues that institutionalisation has three distinct elements: regulative; normative; and cultural–cognitive. He refers to these elements as pillars, as they underpin and support institutionalisation.

### ***The regulative pillar of institutionalisation***

The regulative pillar of institutionalisation comprises those influences associated with rule setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities (Scott, 2014). Arguably, rule-setting is the key influence with both monitoring and sanctioning being subsequent activities. Compliance is on the basis of expediency; it is more advantageous to comply rather than not, regardless of whether the rule is fair or just. As such, regulatory rules are coercive; there is a compulsion by power or force regardless of the individual's wishes. Regulative rules have an instrumental rationale and they are legally sanctioned, which is the basis for their legitimacy. The regulative pillar is visible in institutions as rules, laws and sanctions.

### ***The normative pillar of institutionalisation***

The normative pillar of institutionalisation relates to those aspects that give prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimensions to institutional life. It comprises values and norms. Values are notions of what is preferred/desirable, ‘together with the construction of standards to which existing structures and behaviours can be compared or assessed’ (Scott, 2014, p. 64). Norms specify practices which are deemed legitimate ways of pursuing valued outcomes. Thus normative systems define goals and how they should be achieved (Blake & Davis, 1964).

Norms are considered very significant in institutionalisation (March & Olsen, 1989). In part, this significance is to do with the moral foundation of many institutions (Stinchcombe, 1997), a point made by Glatter (2015) in relation to schools, and the importance of the moral agency of social actors in such institutions (Heclo, 2008). These aspects of this normative pillar explain its significance. Conformance to norms is on the basis of social obligation—a duty, commitment and responsibility to others. There is an obligatory expectancy that individuals will behave appropriately. Importantly, norms are morally governed.

### ***The cultural–cognitive pillar of institutionalisation***

The cultural–cognitive pillar of institutionalisation is concerned with shared notions of the nature of reality and the commonsense-making schema that enable meaning-making and interpretation. The notion is grounded in cultural theory, which offers an insight into how social environments and organisational practices generate their own social dynamics (Douglas, 1982). In cultural theory, individuals and their agency are assigned an explicit role in the joint development and change of social environments while stressing the social reasons for behaviour (Douglas, 1986).

Institutions, through their cultures, cultivate a particular thought-style, which is focused on the particular ways of thinking about and doing things (Douglas, 1986). Once established, institutional thought-styles influence individuals to think and behave in similar ways, almost regardless of whether they agree or disagree. A collective consciousness is thus created (Douglas, 1982), that includes the idea that rules have a particular justification. Disobeying these rules incurs a penalty. These collective cognitive frames are central to information processing in its widest sense; what we attend to; how information is programmed; and how information will be remembered and recalled.

In its institutionalisation role, compliance with the cultural–cognitive pillar is based on a shared understanding of assumptions—matters that are taken-for-granted. It constitutes institutional actors' shared schemes for understanding, interpretation and action. The cultural–cognitive pillar contributes to institutionalisation by mimetic means, through copying or imitation. The expectation is that individuals will behave in an orthodox manner in the conventional, accepted and established way. The validity of this third institutionalising pillar is based on it being logical and understandable; customary and familiar; and endorsed culturally.

### **The carriers of institutionalisation**

The three pillars of institutionalisation are conveyed and communicated by means of a range of carriers (Jepperson, 1991). Scott (2014) identifies four types of carrier: symbolic systems, relational systems, activities, and artefacts (see Table 1). They are described below. We exemplify the carriers in International Schools and draw attention to the challenges International Schools, especially the Type C International Schools, face in securely establishing the carriers.

#### ***Carriers of the regulative pillar***

*Symbolic systems.* Rules and laws are the symbolic systems that carry the regulative pillar of institutionalisation. Thus International Schools will be governed by the 'law of the land' such

**Table 1.** The Institutional pillars and carriers of institutionalisation (adapted from Scott, 2014).

Carriers of Institutionalisation	The Regulative Pillar	The Normative Pillar	The Cultural–Cognitive Pillar
Symbolic systems	Rules Laws	Values Expectations Standards	Categories Typifications Schema Frames Structural isomorphism
Relational systems	Governance systems Power systems	Regimes Authority systems	
Activities	Monitoring Sanctioning Disrupting	Roles Jobs Routines Habits Repertoires of collective action	Predispositions Scripts
Artefacts	Objects complying with mandated specifications	Objects meeting conventions and standards	Objects possessing symbolic value

as employment law; by the requirements of any accreditation/inspection bodies; and by their own policies and codes of practice that relate to aspects of practice requiring legal conformance. Here, International Schools may face a challenge in relation to any curriculum regulations extant in the host country that prevent the provision of an international curriculum or using a non-host country language of communication.

*Relational systems.* These carriers of the regulative pillar include systems of institutional governance, the governance network (Rhodes, 1997), governance interactions (Kooiman, 2003) and the power dynamics within those systems. For International Schools, this regulative pillar will be carried by the governance orders, modes and elements (Kooiman, 2003), which make up the governance network of which it is a part. The governance system for any particular International School is likely to vary according to the school’s location; the school’s ownership, and its institutional governance arrangements, for example, whether the school has a governing body and how it is constituted; the associations of which the school is a member, such as the ECIS, and the membership criteria; the authority of any accrediting bodies; and whether the school is part of a chain of similar schools. Securing these governance arrangements and their international nature presents a challenge for International Schools especially those in the Type C category.

*Activities.* For the regulative pillar, activities include checking, authorising, or suspending/discontinuing processes and are concerned with monitoring procedures, enabling and sustaining appropriate practice, and preventing inappropriate practice. In International Schools, such activities would include school inspections, accrediting body monitoring visits, and suspending accreditation. Engaging successfully in these activities could be challenging for a school wishing to secure its legitimacy as an International School.

*Artefacts.* These are material objects that are discrete and are created by people under physical/cultural influences (Suchman, 2003). Artefacts that carry the regulative pillar of institutionalisation include objects that comply with and show compliance with legal/regulatory requirements, such as policy documents and displayed certification/documents similarly conforming and showing conformance to legal constraints. As with the other carriers of this pillar, the use of artefacts to carry this pillar may be demanding—especially for a Type C International School.

### ***Carriers of the normative pillar***

*Symbolic systems.* These carriers of the normative pillar include: the values and principles that underpin practice; the expected standards; prevailing customs; and accepted patterns of appropriate practice (Scott, 2014). In an International School, they would be evidenced in the school vision statement that specifies the values underpinning everyday practice. Such a statement in a Type B Ideological International School, especially one offering IB programmes, might refer to the centrality of international-mindedness or intercultural understanding. Other examples of symbolic carriers of the norms of an International School would be: the celebration of United Nations Day or World Peace Day; the diversity of nationalities in the student body; and that the medium of communication with students is English, and not the language of the locality. Clearly ensuring such symbolic systems are in place is challenging and again may be particularly so for a Type C School, for which these matters may not be a central concern.

*Relational systems.* For the normative pillar, relational systems that act as carriers include: the institution's authority structure; the way authority-based relationships work to ensure compliance to norms; the legitimacy of the power of those within that structure; and the institution's accountability structure. Arguably, in an International School, although many of the norms would be enforceable managerially, conformance to many norms would depend on the professional standards of staff members and their sense of professional obligation. Arguably, secure management systems need to be in place in any school for its legitimacy as an educational institution. Here the challenge for International Schools is ensuring that the relational systems carry the requisite International School norms.

*Activities.* The various activities that act as the carriers of the normative pillar include organisational roles, tasks and habitual/routine ways of operating especially collectively. In International Schools these would comprise: the practices of those holding particular organisational positions, such as the work of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) Co-ordinator; the undertaking of legitimate tasks, for example, organising the Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) programmes, which are a mandatory core component of the IBDP; habitual shared pedagogic practices, such as drawing on international illustrations/examples to exemplify key points in lessons; and arrays of collaborative practices, such as team teaching to exemplify different cultural perspectives. Here we see the centrality of the provision of an international curriculum in securing the legitimacy of an International School of any type.

*Artefacts.* These carriers of the normative pillar are objects that meet conventions and standards and demonstrate that legitimate norms have been complied with. Such artefacts in an International School would include: setting out the international nature of the school in the school's mission statement; describing the school's core (international) values in the school prospectus; and making clear the international nature of curricular provision on the school web-site. Ensuring an international dimension of such artefacts may present particular challenges for Type C International Schools.

### ***Carriers of the cultural–cognitive pillar***

*Symbolic systems.* Carriers of the cultural–cognitive pillar are concerned with shared conceptions of the nature of reality and common sense-making; are symbolic in nature; and relate

to classifications, groupings, frameworks and models. In International Schools, such carriers might include: models of pedagogical practice that meet (internationally) diverse learning needs; frameworks for working with a diverse student group; and protocols for joint working with a varied set of teaching colleagues from different countries. Here we see the importance of the embodiment of international diversity in enabling a school to be international in nature. That may be challenging for the new schools in the Type C category we discussed earlier.

*Relational systems.* These carriers of the cultural–cognitive pillar relate to the extent to which the relational systems within the institution conform to those in other similar institutions, and the extent to which the institution has a broadly similar identity to other comparable institutions. This similarity then informs and enables a shared sense-making of the experience of being part of the institution. Thus in an International School, legitimacy is gained through the nature of authority of systems that ensure the proper conduct and the operation of those systems to ensure conformance. Arguably, for International Schools to have legitimacy as such institutions, those relational systems should be grounded in the normative analysis of International Schools set out above. Again, grounding a school's relational systems in this way to legitimise a claim to be international may be demanding for a Type C International School.

*Activities.* Carriers of the cultural–cognitive pillar categorised as activities relate to tendencies, inclinations and dominant modes, logics and discourse. For an International School, examples would include the Principal/Director describing the international nature of the school's mission to parents of prospective students, long-established pedagogic practices of an international nature learned over time, and the way staff members reinforce the importance of respecting students of different nationalities. Ensuring the cognitive-cultural pillar is carried in this way may be demanding for a Type C International School and may even be viewed as irrelevant.

*Artefacts.* These carriers of the cultural–cognitive pillar, which relate to the shared understandings and interpretive schema, are those objects which have emblematic or representational significance. In an International School, they would typically include the display of maps showing where students have lived, flags of various nations in schools and outside, multilingual noticeboards and 'Welcome to our school' signs in numerous different languages. For a school teaching an English curriculum in the medium of English in a non-English country but wishing to name itself an International School, such artefacts may be deemed counter-cultural and inappropriate.

## Discussion

To briefly rehearse the main issue we have addressed: the number of schools self-assigning themselves or being designated as International Schools is growing rapidly and may continue to do so. The growth is largely the result of an increase in the Type C Non-Traditional International Schools which is underpinned in part at least by the change in the categorisation of International Schools to include those outside an English-speaking country that provide a curriculum wholly or partly in English (ISC, 2015). The rapid and substantial growth may be even faster and larger than current estimates suggest if a non-Anglo-centric definition of an International School is used. The growth raises concerns about the legitimacy of Type C schools as international educational institutions.

The analytical framework we have used (Scott, 2014), developed and applied to International Schools provides a robust instrument for the analysis of their institutionalisation and consequent legitimacy. We would argue that the framework could be applied to other kinds of school and used in a similar way and could also be used to analyse the legitimacy of particular aspects of a school. Importantly, using the framework has revealed the challenges International Schools face in establishing their legitimacy as International Schools.

Conformance to the institutionalisation requirements to be a legitimate International School are demanding and additional to the requirements for a non-international school. Arguably, ensuring conformance to the requirements of the regulative pillar is more straightforward than securing compliance to those of the normative and cultural–cognitive pillars. The coercive pressure of ‘staying within the law of the land’ is relatively clear cut. The requirements and the threat of sanctions are likely to be relatively explicit. Similarly, as we have discussed, conforming to the requirements in terms of curricular provision or external accreditation is reasonably straightforward; again the requirements are set and the sanctions are clear. We would argue that the nature of the normative and cultural–cognitive pillars present those taking responsibility for the conduct of International Schools with a greater challenge. Many of the carriers of these pillars will be set by the staff of the school and those involved in first order governing and governance, ‘the day-to-day activities of governing’ (Kooiman, 2003, p. 10).

The nature of the student body is a substantive issue in the institutionalisation of International Schools. As we have discussed earlier, International Schools, in a normative sense, should have a diverse student body, and only when a range of nationalities are represented in the student body can they legitimately claim to be international. This issue is substantive for the new and rapidly growing number of Type C International Schools which may recruit students only/largely from the local/indigenous population. Many of the carriers will be manifested through the students, for example, through artefacts adorning walls such as maps showing students’ ‘home countries’, which in turn will affect the way the institutionalising pillars influence aspects of the organisation. A school with only local/indigenous students may not symbolically seem like a typical International School in a normative sense.

We are aware that our exploration and interpretation of the carriers of the institutionalisation of an International School is grounded in a normative analysis of International Schools. For understandable reasons that analysis is based in the characteristics of Type A and Type B International Schools, not least because of their relatively long history and long-standing claim to be legitimate International Schools. Our work here is not to dismiss any claim of a new Type C school to be international but to point to the challenges such schools may face in conforming to the bases for the legitimacy of International Schools of the Type A and B kind. More, we are arguing for a sharper and more comprehensive analysis of the nature of schools referring to themselves or being referred to as International Schools. Such an analysis would be of value to researchers, practitioners and policy-makers around the world.

## Concluding comments

In this article, we have considered the nature of International Schools, how such schools are characterised and the rapid increase in the number of International Schools. It is clear that the International School landscape is changing rapidly and substantively. The analysis we have undertaken here now needs to be extended and developed further and we invite other



researchers to embark on such further analysis. In particular this further research needs to analyse the full diversity of Type C International Schools using more comprehensive and logical definitions of an International School. We have also employed institutionalisation theory (Scott, 2014) to consider the nature of International Schools and the challenges such schools face in securing their legitimacy as International Schools. The exploration is very significant in the context of the rapid growth of International Schools worldwide, and especially those of the Type C Non-Traditional forms. There is scope for using the framework for further exploration not just of International Schools but other forms of schools and the various aspects of all schools. We invite other researchers to engage in that research.

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